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ABSTRACT

This document contains six papers describing program-based research from rural literacy program in Ontario, Canada. Some of the reports describe action research from pilot projects. The papers raise questions about responding to the special challenges of rural needs, such as whether there is an additional expense to providing service of equal quality in rural areas. "The Lambton Learning Lab Project" (Carol Miller, Kevin Churchill) investigates how well a mobile learning lab work can in a rural program. "On Track: Using Tables to Organize and Schedule Data" (Val Hudson) shows how to use tables to improve the planning process. "Rural Literacy and Health Concerns" (Wendy Woodhouse) explains how to identify ways in which literacy needs relate to health concerns. How a literacy program can support job searches for the unemployed is explained in "A Living Library" (Margaret Maynard). "Flying by the Seat of My Pants: A Novice Researcher's Reflections" (Dan Woods) describes what the process of field research feels like the first time. "Recognition for Learning---Life Cycle of a Project" (Andrea Leis) discusses how to develop a system to recognize adult basic learners. The document also contains reviews of two papers: "Initial Assessment Survey Results" (by Bruce Henbest, reviewed by Donna Miniely); and "Learning to Learn: Impacts of the Adult Basic Education Experience on the Lives of Participants" (by Patty Bossort, Bruce Cottingham, and Leslie Gardner, reviewed by Linda Shohet). (KC)

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Occasional Paper
No. 2
Fall 1995

Literacy Field Research Group

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Rural Reflections: Occasional Paper No. 2, Fall 1995

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Introduction

Rural literacy programs are different from their urban counterparts. Rural communities and rural literacy programs have distinct geographic, economic, social and employment characteristics which create barriers to teaching and learning, and to program and community development.

Geographical Characteristics

Geographic barriers are created by significant distances and the lack of public transportation. They result in higher operating costs and the potential isolation of learners and practitioners.

People looking at literacy from an urban perspective can find it difficult to comprehend the distances that some rural programs cover. Rural programs must do outreach and direct service at the same time; outreach can mean having to travel hundreds of kilometres to make people in several communities aware that you can provide direct service to them. For a learner without a car, it may mean no service. The Lambton Learning Lab has shown that a mobile bus is very helpful to people in rural areas.

The cost of distance accumulates in different forms, from long-distance phone charges and gas to travel time and logistical problems in linking tutors and learners.

Isolation affects both practitioners and learners. Networking for professional or personal development is more difficult in rural areas. Sharing resources, not to mention ideas and concerns, is also more cumbersome and costly to orchestrate. Group meetings for learners are difficult to organize, but not impossible, as Dan Woods discovered.

Economic/Employment Characteristics

In rural areas, the workplace often consists of one person or a small number of employees. For this reason, unemployment can be hidden as there are no massive shutdowns to make the news. And, in an individually-run business, one person must have many skills.

Rural along with urban employment has been requiring higher literacy levels. The 1993 law requiring farmers to pass an exam before being able to transport or use pesticides is a case in point. Margaret Maynard's article looks at combining employment searches with literacy upgrading.

Employment in rural areas is typically seasonal, whether their local economy is based on tourism, agriculture, or resource industries. Seasonal employment affects the availability and energy level of learners. It is difficult to find time for class hours during haying season or have regular classes when an adult has already put in a long day at a physically demanding job. Some learners are only able to attend literacy classes while unemployed.

Social Characteristics

Rural and small communities have a distinct character. First, by definition, they are small in terms of population. People tend to know one another and recognize newcomers as outsiders. It takes time to built trust and start programs. In a rural setting it usually takes three to five years to become known in the community. Wendy Woodhouse's article demonstrates the need for building on established trust relationships in order to conduct a literacy survey.

Another social barrier is the fear of losing one's anonymity. In some communities, there may be a stigma associated with the term "literacy," and even "upgrading" is not always viewed positively. As long as this stigma persists, there will be adults who will not want to be associated with a literacy program.

Community development in rural areas needs strong leadership. Literacy programs do not only prepare adults for the workforce. Literacy supports lifelong learning and personal and cultural development, which contribute to healthy individuals and strong communities. Andrea Leis' article looks at recognizing different modes of learning and facilitating transitions among delivery agencies.

Ontario Rural Literacy

Ontario Rural Literacy is an interest group of adult educators from community-based, college and school board programs who are concerned with the particular needs of literacy program deliverers and learners in the rural areas of Ontario. They are interested in promoting awareness of literacy issues among the general public as well as providing support to rural programs. The group became increasingly aware of the distinct nature and special needs of rural literacy programs as they shared information at meetings and conferences. In 1993-94, the Literacy Branch funded Rural Special Projects to highlight the distinctness of rural programs and make known the programs' needs and recommendations.

Research on the needs of adult learners and barriers to participation in rural Ontario must be carried out. Successful programs need to be documented and evaluated; key elements should be identified, applied to other rural programs, and then re-evaluated.

Learning from Pilot Projects

This paper is an important step in providing program-based research from rural literacy programs. A number of these reports describe action research: learning from a pilot project.

These articles are all about rural programs, however they are not just about the needs and issues of rural programs. All programs need to organize information, as Val Hudson demonstrates with her tables.

These papers raise interesting questions about responding to the special challenges of rural needs. Indeed, is there an additional expense to providing service of equal quality in rural areas?

Readers who are familiar with the Literacy Field Research Group's training manual on research skills will recognize that subtitles within some articles highlight different stages of the research process. Hopefully, all of the projects have gone through all phases of the research cycle, but some of the authors focus on particular aspects of research in their articles.

One very strong message emerges from these papers: Do not undertake pilot projects in isolation; do them to understand ways to improve the service you provide and move your program forward.

HURON
MIDDLESEX
ELGIN
KENT
LAMBTON
COUNTY
Forest
Plympton
Township
Sarnia
Wyoming
Corunna
Petrolia
Brigden
Alvinston
Inwood
Florence

The Lambton Learning Lab Project

Sponsored by the Organization for Literacy in Lambton (OLL)

Original report written by Carol Miller in 1993, edited and updated with additional information by Kevin Churchill in June 1995.

General Description

The original goal of the four-year Lambton Learning Lab project was to conduct a needs assessment and deliver literacy instruction to remote rural residents in Lambton County by:
a) providing transportation for learners to Lambton County Board of Education small group programs in nearby centres; and
b) providing one-to-one instruction in the home or other locations if necessary.
The project consisted of a mini-van equipped with various learning resources, some portable computer equipment and a qualified driver/instructor.

Service Area Description

The service area for the project is Lambton County, which is situated on the Canada/US border at the bottom of Lake Huron, where the lake flows into the St. Clair river. The total population for the area is 124,590, with 68% of the population base in the city of Sarnia, and the remaining 32% in the rural areas surrounding Sarnia. The main industries are the petrochemical industry and agriculture. Like the rest of the province, job losses have been heavy in the last five years, mainly, but not exclusively in the manufacturing sector. The 1990 Statistics Canada literacy survey indicated that Lambton County literacy levels are somewhat lower than the national average.

The Project

In its inception in 1991, the Learning Lab's initial objectives were: to identify individual educational/ literacy needs and to assist learners in locating and accessing services. Through its public relations activities, the Learning Lab would heighten public awareness of literacy issues, educate the public about the implications of illiteracy, and encourage public involvement in OLL initiatives. The Learning Lab's delivery of literacy services was to be innovative, flexible and adapted to learners' needs. And, since literacy issues frequently coexist with health, employment and

poverty issues in learners' lives, a goal of fostering partnerships between community groups was embraced.

Learning Lab Needs and Interest Survey

In keeping with the initial objective of identifying individual educational/literacy needs, a Needs and Interest Survey was presented to a total of 55 learners in the towns of Corunna, Petrolia, Alvinston and Forest. Previous attempts to gather survey information (through the public elementary school system) were documented in the 1992 Learning Lab report. It included recommendations for readministering the survey. In 1993, new groups of learners in Corunna, Petrolia, Alvinston and Forest were directly targeted for distribution of the survey. This method proved to be much more successful. The responses obtained provided useful information for adult educators in Lambton County. They also reconfirmed previous estimates of literacy levels in the general population.

Survey Results

Of the 55 people surveyed:

- 42% had graduated from high school, 36% had completed Grades 10 & 11
- 22% had Grade 9 education or less. These figures closely adhere to the estimated 20% of adults who are considered functionally illiterate.
- 88% of the respondents who had not completed high school indicated a desire to obtain their high school diploma, while only 13% indicated no interest in working towards that goal.

In response to the question dealing with areas in which people wanted help (reading, writing or math): 27% of those surveyed wanted help in math, 18% wanted help with writing and 9% wanted help reading.

Approximately 42% of the people surveyed wanted to learn more about Adult Education Programs in Lambton County and how they could get their High School Diploma. 30% wanted more information on Home Study.

Public Relations / Outreach Activities

The publicity and marketing campaigns capitalized on the knowledge that it is difficult to reach literacy learners using print-based media. Our focus was mostly on non-print media for publicity.

In order to raise public awareness about literacy issues, a variety of public relations and promotional activities were undertaken in 1992 - 1993. Following a press conference in mid-December 1992, The Sarnia Observer ran a photo of the Sarnia MP with OLL personnel. The description that accompanied the photo announced the allocation of grant money for the Learning Lab operation. A reporter with CKTY, the local FM radio station, was present at the same news conference. He taped an interview with OLL's President Ann Toth and Carol Miller. In the interviews, we described OLL objectives and the Learning Lab operations. The interview was aired on CKTY's community news magazine.

In February 1993, CKCO television was invited to develop a feature article on the Learning Lab activities. A reporter and the mobile production crew of CKCO TV met with Kevin Churchill, "Susan" (a literacy learner) and Carol at the Plympton Township Offices. CKCO produced a 5-minute video of the interviews with Kevin and Susan and the Learning Lab in action. The story was aired twice on CKCO - once on the 6 o'clock report and again during the 11 o'clock report. A few months later, the video was shown to adult educators at George Perry Adult Learning Centre as a professional development activity about literacy.

In addition, we prepared a slide presentation for use at the Rural Routes Literacy Conference in Centralia, Ontario. In the future, the slide presentation and video could be used in public relations campaigns to promote the Learning Lab and heighten awareness of - and sensitivity to - literacy issues with various service providers in urban and rural settings.

Learning Lab Service Delivery

The Learning Lab Project attempted to encompass a broad-based, learner-centred service delivery model in its operations. The rationale for this was to make a variety of programs accessible to learners with varied literacy levels and educational needs, i.e., students with low and moderate functional literacy levels could enroll for pre-credit, upgrading, ESL and home study credit courses with the Learning Lab. By using such a broad-based literacy service delivery model, it was possible to establish a pool of learners and provide instructional programs appropriate to learner's needs and expectations.

The Learning Lab completed its second year of operation in April 1993. Since May 1992, when the Learning Lab's year-end report was submitted to the OLL Board of Directors, the following observations were made:

Demand for programs and services declined in the summer months. Last summer (1992), only four students indicated an interest in continuing studies over the summer. A similar trend has been noted this year. Decreased demand for service in summer was expected since rural communities and residents are typically involved in agricultural activities and many have increased family commitments then.

Increased requests for services were expected in early September. Those expectations were not immediately met. Enrollment slowly rose in September and early October. The delay was due in part to the late farming season we expected last year. This problem was further compounded by funding uncertainty. By November, when funding problems firmed up and public relations campaigns were implemented, enrollment had begun to rise.

Have Van... Will Travel !

Throughout the seven-month period from October 1992 to April 1993, the Learning Lab reached its maximum enrollment. Over those months, eleven learners were involved in one-to-one weekly instruction in the programs offered.

Fluctuations in enrollment and demand for services that occurred over the seven-month period were attributed to the following factors:

- learners reached their educational goals, eg., obtained credits
- learners found employment and were unavailable for services
- learners returned to full-time day school
- learners' time commitments changed, eg., caring for newborn babies
- learners moved to city locations where they could access other programs
- learners enrolled in intensive training/retraining programs at other institutions, eg., Lambton College.

In the past year, learners in Inwood, Bothwell, Alvinston, Florence, Brigden, Wyoming, Forest and those towns surrounding rural locales were targeted for service on a weekly basis.

In 1992 - 93, transportation support functions of the Learning Lab consisted primarily of reaching individual and small groups of learners in rural community centres and learner's homes. The Learning Lab was also used to transport learners, teachers and OLL board members to regional and provincial literacy workshops and conferences.

Partnerships

The Learning Lab linked with the George Perry Adult Learning Centre as an independent service, extending their adult outreach programs to unserviced rural areas. As a collaborative venture with the Lambton County Board of Education and the Organization for Literacy in Lambton, the Learning Lab's literacy, home study and ESL programs were consistent with the Board of Education's philosophy of Life-Long Learning as well as with OLL's purpose of promoting and improving literacy levels in Lambton County.

Working within the OLL, the Lambton Learning Lab was involved in the family literacy initiative Take-a-Book project. It helped Learning Lab Learners and their children to have their own first books. The excitement and gratitude expressed was sincere and heart-warming. The Take-a-Book project gave many families quality literature that they wouldn't have accessed otherwise.

Learning opportunities offered to Learning Lab participants provided group and individualized instructional programs that facilitated higher levels of literacy for educationally disadvantaged adults in rural Lambton. In 1992-93, these instructional program opportunities were broad-based,

varied, innovative and flexible—conditions essential for the successful implementation of individual learner-centred programs.

Recommendations

The following are general recommendations to Literacy Providers who may want want to establish a "Learning Lab" or similar project.

1. Consider how viable this service will be to fund on an ongoing basis. To undertake a "pilot" and determine that a service is necessary and then not provide it is irresponsible and unfair to learners. This is a built-in difficulty with projects.
2. Research vehicle costs well, compare quoted prices. Consider approaching service clubs for help in this area. (Note: Service clubs usually want to have their name visible on a donated vehicle, and this can pose a problem in terms of respect for learner confidentiality.)
3. Make sure that the vehicle is well equipped in case of emergency. (flares, Help sign, blankets, cellular phone, etc.)
4. Promote the service widely and through various media including print, radio, and television if possible.
5. Integrate and promote the service as a supplement to existing programs, rather than as a separate entity.
6. Meet regularly (weekly) with staff person to review, update, schedule and monitor progress, etc.
7. Providers should look at community fundraising for vehicle costs and building staff time into core funding.

Endnote

The Learning Lab pilot project was completed in December '93 and lack of stable funding made it unclear whether the service would continue. The presence of the Learning Lab over the past two years had become a valued service in the county and a useful link between the community-based (OLL) program and the school board's (L.C.B.E.'s) small group centres. The OLL Board of Directors was committed to providing the service and applied to the National Literacy Secretariat to continue funding.

When it became apparent that NLS funding was not forthcoming to continue the project, the OLL began to look at how it could continue to offer the service with alternative sources of funding. Based on these realities, and recommendations from activities to date, the following modifications to its programs were made:

1. Fund the van lease maintenance costs and insurance, etc. through fundraising activity (Bingo).

2. Focus on transporting learners to and from existing small group programs and use volunteers for the one-to-one learners who had previously been served by the Learning Lab.

This change allowed a more efficient, cost-effective schedule (staff hours were reduced from 35 hours a week to 25) and also meant that the staff requirements were for a driver/tutor, that would work with individual learners at the small group sites, as opposed to an instructor with a teaching degree. The driver/tutor wage is funded through a present OLL grant and fundraising efforts.

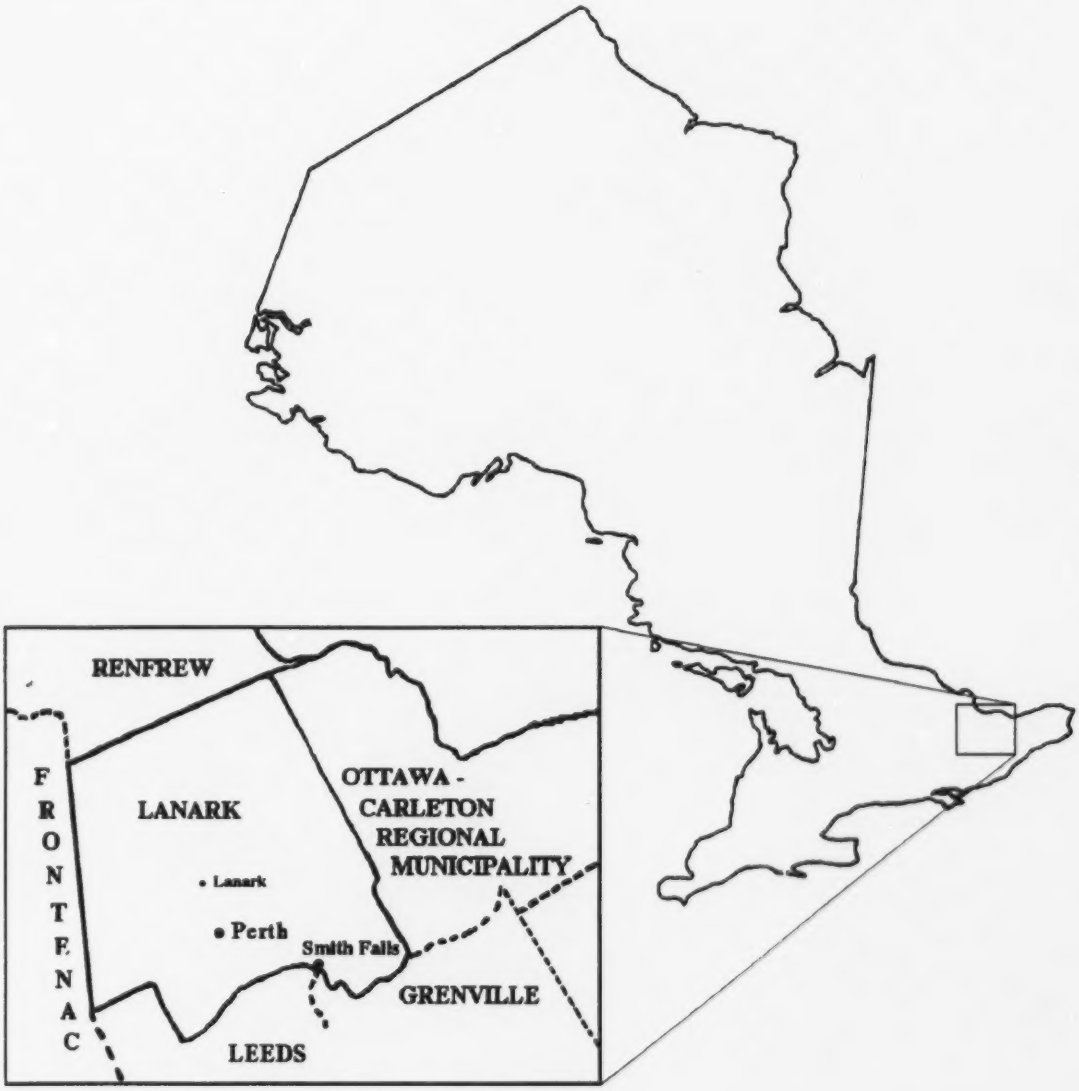
These changes were not without costs. Because the staff position was significantly different, a change in program staff occurred, and learners who had been getting one-to-one instruction were given the opportunity to be matched with a volunteer. Most, but not all of the learners chose to continue. The only alternative to these changes would have been to discontinue the service completely, and based on the demand and need for this service, this would have been a disappointment to many people who have benefited from the services of the Lambton Learning Lab.

In summary, the concept of providing solutions to the transportation barrier to isolated rural residents was the main thrust of the original Learning Lab, and continues to this day. Transportation as a support service to adult learners is key to attendance for many learners served by the project. This project has become a small but important part of the overall literacy delivery model in Lambton county, and the OLL wishes to continue the project as long as there is a need and available funds.

About the Authors

Carol Miller, B.A., B. Ed. was the Learning Lab Project Coordinator from 1992 to 1994, and is a qualified teacher with a background in linguistics and presently works as an occasional teacher for the Lambton County Board of Education.

Kevin Churchill is a literacy worker in Lambton County. Kevin serves as part-time executive officer for the Organization for Literacy in Lambton and is also coordinator for the Southwestern Literacy Desktop Publishing Centre.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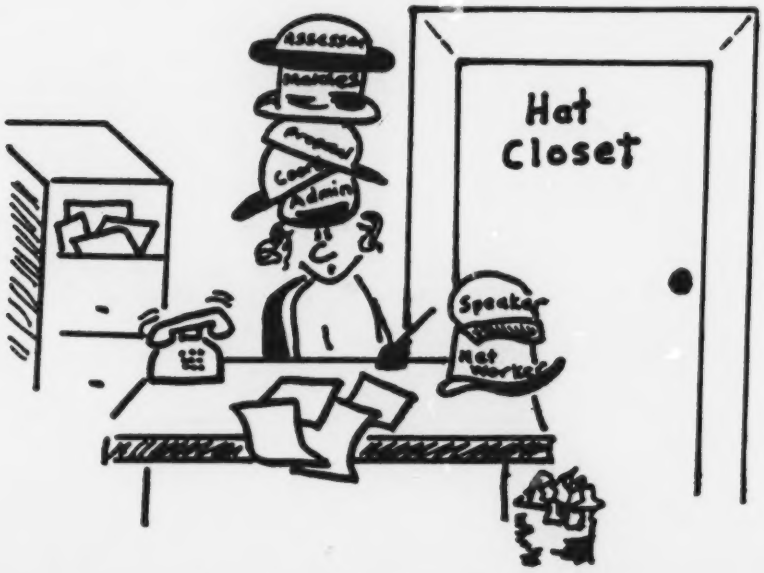
GRENVILLE
LEEDS

On Track: Using Tables to Organize and Schedule Data

by Valerie Hudson, Coordinator, Lanark Reading Network, Perth



Staff in community-based literacy programs have to be versatile, wear many hats and be excellent time managers. They must be able to write clear and concise grant proposals and reports. These are time consuming activities and in a busy office, it is difficult to keep track of all the information needed. At report time, the questions "When did we do that?" or "What did we do?" surface. Building a good tracking system is important.

Traditionally, tables and charts have been used to illustrate complex data and clarify information in dense, cumbersome paragraphs. But, tables can be used as a basic structure to plan and schedule proposals and reports. Tables tell us a story and emphasize the right information. They are a format, a layout, for visualizing and clarifying your work. Busy people don't have time to wade through dense text. These tables easily reveal key information.

Tables don't make the struggle with the process easier; but, they do make objectives, methods, and activities easier to plot. Simple, uncluttered tables force the writer to be clear and concise, and to think in steps. Areas of dense print are minimized. Information is easier to read. Your project is visualized in a table. When you sketch out your objectives, methods and activities, you will quickly see information or steps you have overlooked, or sequences of activities that won't work. The information will dictate its own priorities.

I developed the following tables for our program to help us see where we are going. They are always within reach so we can keep ourselves on track.

Table 1 presents a goal with the corresponding numbered objectives, methods, and activities, and a list of who is responsible. Objectives are hopes for achievement within a time frame. Funding agencies need to know the goals and objectives of a project. To achieve an objective, methods are selected that depend on purpose, funding, and staff experience of an environment. Each method has corresponding activities that are listed in the next column.

Table 1
QUALITY STANDARD #4: Learner commitment to program

GOAL: To have a written policy for student participation in the program.

OBJECTIVE	METHODS	ACTIVITY	STAFF
1. The Students' Committee will develop participation policy for students by August 1996.	1. Discussions with the Students' Committee (SC) 2. Policy will be discussed through: a) committees b) newsletter c) questionnaires 3. Policy will be developed and drafted.	1. Regular meetings of SC 2. A policy will be: a) reviewed b) drafted c) presented & d) approved by the Board e) published in the Newsletter.	staff, students, tutors, Board members (BM), Students' Committee (SC)
2. The participation policy will be integrated into program documents by August 1996.	1. Program documents will be reviewed. 2. Policy will be incorporated into program practices and documents.	1. Regular meetings of SC 2. SC review and revise program documents. Students/tutors will be encouraged to: 3. report hours and progress 4. formalize ongoing goal-setting.	staff, students, tutors, BM, SC
3. The effectiveness of the policy and process will be evaluated during 1996.	1. Information will be gathered through: a) questionnaires b) stats collection c) feedback. 2. Information will be evaluated. 3. Findings will be reported to Board.	1. Questionnaire developed. 2. Information will be: a) gathered b) processed c) reported to Committees, Board, Literacy Community.	staff, students, tutors, BM, SC

ACTIVITY PLANS

Table 2 is a time line in table format that helps plan and track activities for the length of the project. Your schedule can be visualized at a glance. Activities stand out clearly and details are not buried in print. Funders and other members of the project can easily read and follow your plan. Activity tables are plotted on a monthly basis with an X, because activities are dependent on many variables.

Table 2 ACTIVITY PLAN
Quality Standard #4: Developing a student participation policy by August 1996

ACTIVITY	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A
Weekly workshops			x	x	x	x								
Work on Participation Policy			x	x	x	x		x						
Draft Participation Policy						x		x						
Present Participation Policy to Board									x					
Revise Student-Tutor Agreement										x				
Present policy to students/tutors & to Board									x	x				
Article in Newsletter										x				
Include in matching process & Tutor Training												x	x	x
Evaluation by Students' Committee					x	x						x	x	x
Monthly meeting of Students' Committee							x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Ongoing documentation of process	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Students' Committee reports to Board	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

A Few Tips

1. Use consistent terms, structures and number systems.
2. Number the objectives, methods and activities.
3. Introduce acronyms after using the full expression, e.g. Students' Committee (SC).

METHODS

Methods Tables (Tables 3 and 4) are used during projects to keep track of activities and log results. The outcome and evaluation of a method is important. How each method will be evaluated depends on the objective. If the objective was to increase the number of tutors in a rural area by August 1995, and a newspaper ad was one of the methods, success is measured by the number of responses received as a result of the ad. After evaluation, if this did not work another method is attempted. Methods must be flexible. New methods will be added in response to feedback as the project continues.

Table 3
OBJECTIVE: To increase knowledge of methods for rural outreach

METHODS	OUTCOME	EVALUATION	STAFF
Research available materials	1. compiled materials 2. gained knowledge of existing models of delivery	Research is always necessary. Knowledge built staff confidence and abilities.	Co-ordinator
Attend Regional Rural Literacy Network meetings	Sharing of problems, methods, successes.	Visits to different programs was excellent.	Co-ordinator
Attend Rural Literacy Conference in Bolton	1. Copy of Pesticide course 2. Sharing of methods, problems, success with other literacy providers.	Excellent: breaks down isolation felt by rural literacy programs. Chance to speak with Ministry reps.	Co-ordinator, Board Member
Discussions with other agencies in rural Lanark	Each agency determined that it took approximately 3 years to establish a presence and develop trust. Discussion also reaffirmed need for literacy program.	A one-year project only scratches the surface. Helps break isolation of literacy groups.	Staff

Table 4
OBJECTIVE: To conduct two tutor training sessions.

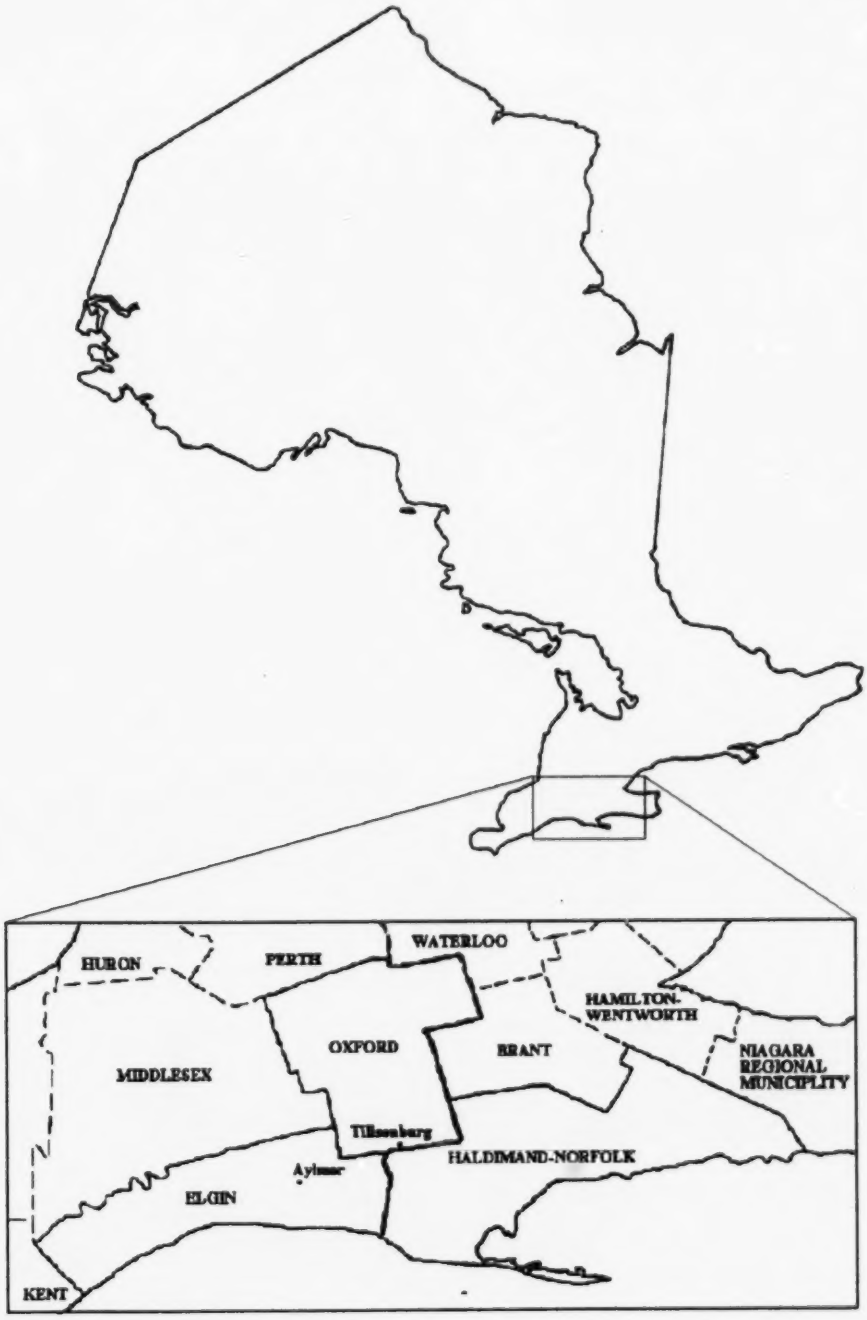
METHODS	OUTCOME	EVALUATION	STAFF
Recruitment	Posters, ads in paper, volunteers already on list, presentations	- ads in paper worked for 4 tutors - presentations 1 tutor - posters good for some students	Staff
1 session in Perth	1 tutor for Lanark, 7 tutors for county	- session made up of 3 workshops - plan on expanding and developing training	
1 session in Council Chambers in Lanark village	- 8 tutors: 4 for Lanark - revised tutor training manual - roads under construction, heat and haying season - lost 2 potential tutors by giving them a book to read that they objected to.	- rural rhythms affect recruitment, tutoring and learning. - our presence in the Council Chambers expanded community knowledge of who we were.	Co-ordinator
Summary	15 tutors 4 tutors for matching 1 tutor for small group class.		

Conclusion

It is challenging to take an idea and transform it into an organized, well-presented proposal. More challenging is writing a report that summarizes a year's work. In a busy environment, a clear, organized system for presenting data is a necessity.

About the Author

Val Hudson is Coordinator of the Lanark County Reading Network. She has an M.A. in Women's Studies and has studied Visual Arts. She also teaches Technical Writing and English at Algonquin College. In her free time, she loves to paint.



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Rural Literacy and Health Concerns

by Wendy Woodhouse

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to bring to light health and literacy issues evident within the Mexican[1] Mennonite population near Tillsonburg. It attempts to address health concerns as a focus for literacy in rural areas, recognizing and using the cultural context and perspective of the Mexican Mennonite group. It was assumed that the results of the study would reveal cultural perceptions of clients concerning literacy and health. During all phases of the project, the process was considered client-centred, with actual client input provided at all stages.

The Community

The Tillsonburg and District Multi-Service Centre serves the area within a 20-km radius from the Town of Tillsonburg. This area cuts across the counties of Oxford, Elgin, and Haldimand Norfolk. Within this tri-county area, there is a large - and growing - very poor population of Mennonites from Mexico, Central America and South America. The people come seeking agricultural employment and settlement. Their values emphasize simplicity, abstention from materialism and worldly education beyond basic knowledge, and respect for patriarchal social organization.

The health needs of this group relate to nutrition, immunization, sexual health, mental health, parenting and prenatal care, life skills, and physical well-being. Literacy skills training was considered as a means of addressing these health concerns. To accomplish this task, literacy must be perceived as more than reading and writing; it extends to reasoning, decoding, and a prior knowledge of factual information.

Method

Phase I - Dialogue

The initial phase of the project was exploratory and consultative. Dialogue was initiated with community service providers for literacy, health and

1. Although these people are referred to as Mexican Mennonites, some of them have come from other Central and South American countries.

settlement within the tri-county area as well as with key individuals from within the group of Mexican Mennonites. Representative groups included public health officials, community-based literacy providers, the Mennonite Help Centre, and the Aylmer Resource Centre, Mennonite Central Committee and individuals of Mennonite background.

The purpose of this initial phase was to clearly define the specific health/literacy needs. The information gathered during this informal dialogue helped in formulating specific questions for the questionnaires. This exploratory and consultative phase was most valuable and informative, both for guiding the process and ensuring reliable results.

Phase II - Questionnaire

Phase II included the design, delivery and completion of two questionnaires:
i) client questionnaire (delivered to the Mennonite population), and
ii) service provider questionnaire (delivered to health and literacy professionals).

a) Design
The questionnaires were designed by the coordinator with input, both formal and informal, from a variety of sources including the exploratory and consultative dialogue.

(i) Client Questionnaire
Cultural sensitivity and confidentiality were recognized as key factors as questions were formulated. The questions presumed that the client came from Mexico or another Central or Latin American country. Questions presented addressed basic personal statistical information regarding settlement, language/literacy/education, and health information. Due to the fact that the education and literacy levels among this population varied, flexibility was provided in clarification and explanation. For example, clients were asked to define "health" in their own words, but if they were unable to, a definition was provided (see p. 27). The client questionnaire was pretested to adhere to principles of cultural sensitivity and general comprehension.

Two key resource people associated with the Mennonite Help Centre were consulted and asked to review the questionnaire. Both individuals were university graduates of Mennonite descent. Their familiarity with the culture enhanced our confidence that the questionnaire would be culturally appropriate. Both individuals recognized the need for the interviewer to have flexibility in rewording questions, considering the

varied lengths of residency of the Mennonite population.

(ii) Service Provider Questionnaire
The questionnaire was designed with questions that were both exploratory and observational in nature. In no way was it seen as a strictly statistical analysis. The questions were organized into categories of general information, Mennonite traits, literacy and health. The questionnaire relied on the expertise of key people who dealt with the population in question. Service providers were encouraged to include any anecdotes or examples which might illustrate their answers. In addition, service providers were encouraged to add comments or extra information that they felt would be valuable to the study.

b) Delivery and Completion
All questionnaires, both for the service providers and the clients, had a face sheet attached, providing basic guidelines for completion. The face sheet attached to client questionnaires was much more detailed than that for the service providers, as a number of volunteers were involved in the delivery of the questionnaire to clients/consumers. The face sheet for the client questionnaires included instructions for administering the questionnaire (i.e. one-to-one interview preferred), suggestions regarding sensitivity to the clients' culture, and suitable ways to provide clarification.

Service providers received their questionnaires and completed them directly. A number of volunteers and staff assisted in the delivery of the questionnaire to clients. Clients who were asked to complete the questionnaire were known to the service provider administering the questionnaire.

The client sampling included Mennonites born in Mexico, Central or South America, now permanently residing in the tri-county area. The sample was a random sample, although the clients did have some kind of association with a service provider. The length of time they had resided in Canada was not a factor. Some of the clients had had literacy training, others had not.

The delivery of the questionnaire to many clients was uniquely facilitated via volunteer tutors in a one-to-one tutor/student match relationship with adult literacy students of Mennonite background. The advantage of using tutors was revealed in the rapport, trust and understanding between the tutor and the student. The comfort level and atmosphere was maintained with the best interests of the client considered.

All client questionnaires were completed in a one-to-one interview fashion. Clients were advised of the purpose of the questionnaire, i.e. to

identify the needs of the Mennonite population, and were informed that answers to the questionnaire were voluntary and confidential.

The process recognized the sensitivity of this cultural group. The one-to-one format also allowed the interviewer to explain a question concisely, or reword a question, if a client did not understand a question. If, after the interviewer read the question, the client required clarification, this was done concisely. While providing clarification, interviewers were discouraged from prompting the client. Interviewers were advised that the answers provided on behalf of the client should be the client's answers.

Expectations and Limitations of the Survey

A total of 9 questionnaires were received from service providers and a total of 43 Mexican Mennonites were interviewed.

The intent of this study was to provide insights, not to produce data for statistical tabulation. However, the results of the study were presented in an objective fashion. Some key variables were cross-referenced with others within the same sampling group. In addition, there was a cross-referencing of some variables from one sampling group (service providers) to the other (clients). Other items were isolated, without cross-referencing, and results were noted.

Usefulness of the Study

The purpose of this study and the results provided the groundwork for further investigation and discussion. The paper presents a catalyst for committees to review and address needs of the Mennonite population. Committees consisting of service providers, clients, consumers, and interested community individuals were formed to review the paper, examine the results, formulate conclusions, and present recommendations to address needs. This ensures that the results will not be viewed in strict isolation.

Health Problems Directly Related to Literacy

The three most commonly mentioned problems were:

1. misuse of drugs resulting from an inability to read prescriptions or instructions from a doctor or a bottle. (It was noted that the usual attitude toward medicine was more equals better.)

2. poor nutruition of babies, children and selves stemming from not being able to read.
3. lack of knowledge in areas such as: the birth process, anatomy, bodily functions and the seriousness of smoking.

Preliminary Observations Regarding Methodology

The following observations were the result of input from service providers, staff, and volunteers who assisted in completing client questionnaires; and clients. The following information allowed us the opportunity to informally evaluate results to date.

1. A public health representative was looking for a broader concept of health than what the questionnaire accommodated. Additional components of health could have included housing issues and safety issues. (Health promotion and quality of life were factors in this regard.) A broader definition of health may have offered additional results.

Definitions of Health

Clients were asked to define what health meant to them. Their definitions fell into four categories:

- the absence of illness, e.g. "free from disease"
- a positive state of both body and mind, e.g. "being able to function physically and mentally"
- related to work or family responsibilities, e.g. "feeling good so you can work and take care of your family"
- a condition, neither a negative nor a positive state of being, e.g. "the way you feel physically and mentally"

If clients were unable to define health, the following definition was provided:

Health: the condition of your mind and body, whether you are well or ill. "If you are well, you enjoy good health."

2. Many volunteers/service providers were pleased that questions were tested for cultural sensitivity, and that clients/consumers were provided flexible options when it came to answering or refraining from answering a question.

3. One service provider indicated the need to reword some questions in the questionnaire. (The questionnaire guidelines offered flexibility in this area.) Rewording, on occasion, was required more among the more recent immigrant population.

4. The time sequencing in the delivery of the project was most difficult. As noted previously, the implementation date of the project was dependent upon official notification of project approval, and the shifting of the fiscal year at the Centre. Unfortunately, the delay of the starting date (April 1, 1993) posed further difficulties. The questionnaires were delivered to clients in early July. Some of the barriers, in receiving full return of responses, included the following:
   - Many Mennonites work in agriculture during the summer months - this posed difficulties for meeting with them.
   - As a result of project completion or lack of continued funding, some projects and programs of other literacy providers came to an end prior to questionnaire delivery.
   - Some staff were no longer employed.
   - Although some service providers were truly interested in health/literacy issues among the Mennonite people, they were unable (or minimally so) to be involved in assisting clients to complete questionnaires due to staffing commitments and employment duties.

5. During the consultation period and the delivery of the questionnaire, service providers revealed the following views:
   - a very sincere, genuine desire to assist the Mennonite people in a fashion appropriate to the Mennonite cultural identity;
   - a frustration regarding the many barriers that affect these people in the areas of health, settlement and literacy;
   - a strong desire for Mennonite women to recognize stress, bad nerves, and abuse as physical and mental health issues;
   - a desire to empower these people to seek out their human rights;
   - a personal dilemma in informing women about sexual health issues and mental health issues thereby changing the dynamics of a patriarchal family system and causing family conflict; and
   - a sense of urgency in addressing the needs of this population.

If anyone has interest in the specific results of this research project, you are welcome to contact Wendy Woodhouse at:

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(519) 842-9007

Acknowledgements

The success of this report was dependant upon a number of people: the many service providers, volunteers and, especially the respondents who shared their views of literacy and health quite openly. Special thanks to Sande Minke, OTAB-Literacy Unit, and Lynn Lalonde, National Literacy Secretariat for their support and guidance in funding this project.

About the Author

Wendy Woodhouse has been coordinator of the Adult Basic Literacy Program, at the Tillsonburg & District Multi-Service Centre, since December 1989. The program offers one-to-one assistance to adult students via trained volunteer tutors. She holds a Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Education degree from the University of Western Ontario.

HAMILTON-
WENTWORTH
Beamsville
LINCOLN
COUNTY
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Catharines
NIAGARA
REGIONAL
MUNICIPLITY
HALDIMAND-
NORFOLK

A Living Library:

Unemployment Support Services in a Rural Setting

by Margaret Maynard

How the Project Evolved

Unemployment in the Niagara Region has been a very serious problem for some years. As the 1990 recession deepened across Canada, unemployment statistics soared in our area to levels of 15% and more with an equivalent number of unemployed persons receiving social assistance.

Since many of the unemployed lacked the literacy skills to conduct an effective job search, the Literacy Council of Lincoln requested funding for a literacy project to create a model to co-ordinate support services locally and to provide broad-based literacy upgrading for job preparedness to those searching for work or seeking entry or re-entry into the workforce. It would also provide access to information and resources, as well as referrals to other agencies and formal educational institutions on the continuum of lifelong learning. The application was successful and funding for a Pilot Project was granted for Phase 1 to begin in early 1993.

The Region

In the Niagara Peninsula, a lack of public transportation, the high cost of private transportation as well as daycare expenses created an additional burden for the many long-term unemployed who had to travel constantly to the two main urban centres of St. Catharines or Hamilton to access information and available services.

The Literacy Council of Lincoln recognized that a lack of literacy skills often constitutes one of the major barriers to finding employment and so the Council attempted to provide some local

assistance to the unemployed to address those needs. The major initiatives were: Job Search Information Nights, workshops in job search techniques and an informal support network for job-seekers. These resulted in creating a Job Finders Centre at our local library.

The Beginnings

In April of 1992, the Council advertised in the St. Catharines Standard that it would co-sponsor a Job Search Information Night at the Library in Beamsville. [We believed that people lacking literacy skills might require help in preparing job search materials.] We invited five service providers to give presentations at the meeting. Seventy people registered and over 50 attended. Out of the attendees, an additional 30 left their names and telephone numbers as persons in need of further local support in creating résumés, covering letters, filling in applications, identifying sources of information, etc.

To accommodate the need for training in job search techniques, we invited the St. Catharines Canada Employment Centre to bring a 2-day workshop to Beamsville to provide some local support. Fifteen people registered and attended the workshop. Out of that group an informal self-help support group for job seekers was formed since we had no allocation of staff or budgetary resources.

The members of this group set up a network and the numbers of those desperately seeking resources and information grew throughout 1992. A public information session citing the needs of the unemployed was held locally in late June of 1992 with many service providers and representatives from local agencies in attendance. The need for local co-ordination of services was evident.

A Job Finders Centre

To inform the public that assistance and support were available locally we distributed a Factsheet describing our services throughout the community. We also advertised our services on the local Cable TV Channel since this service is free to non-profit organizations. We also informed all of our network partners and agencies, and established a Job Finders Centre within the Library. The job seekers came in.

We were unsure what level of learner would come in. GM had shut down causing a job crisis. Most of their former employees had a Grade 9 education from 20 years ago and were now middle-aged. Their need to upgrade their skills was evident in that they couldn't fill in applications or prepare a résumé.

Job Search Support Club

We hired an Employment Services Worker to facilitate a Job Search Support Club every Monday morning at the Library assisted by a literacy tutor volunteer. The Monday morning group is an informal group open to all who are looking for work. We never know who is coming or what level they are at. Consequently, we let the group choose what they want to focus on (e.g. résumés or interviews) and what they want to achieve. It is client-driven in that we pay attention to the clients' interests, goals and special needs, e.g. providing support for a physically disabled person to help him get high school and college training.

We identify specific needs for both groups and individuals and, where appropriate, those needs are addressed within large group, small group or individual sessions. Participants are often encouraged and assisted to practise writing introductory scripts for making telephone calls or responding to interviewer questioning. We role-play introductions from the scripts, and invite active participation in written and oral presentations to enhance communication skills. Attendees come from all socio-economic and educational levels and sometimes much coaching and support is required for the participant to gain the skills and confidence required to begin the job search.

Integrated Groups

The range of these searches is varied: from airline pilot to teacher to landscaper to construction and greenhouse worker. Special needs attendees from the Association for Community Living are integrated into the group and usually cheered on. They may come with their caseworker who helps them join into groups and participate in workshops. A great deal of camaraderie, networking and sharing of experiences is generated at the Monday morning sessions. The Library is often full of "old friends" using the resources (e.g. trade journals, dictionaries, occupational code handbooks, videos, newspapers, résumé books and computers) and sometimes providing

or receiving literacy services: truly an excellent model for a "Living Library".

Tutor Volunteers

We started with one tutor volunteer, however, in Phase II of the Project (1994). This has grown to four literacy tutor volunteers. The staff tutor/student co-ordinator is also present most Mondays. The tutor volunteers receive training three to four times a year on teaching techniques, learning styles, working with disabilities, etc. We have found that the high ratio of tutors to attendees facilitates individual, small group and large group interaction.

Meeting the Rural Challenges

Average attendance varies from ten to twenty. It fluctuates regularly due to members getting jobs, entering training programs, losing seasonal, part-time or contract jobs, requiring more assistance, etc. We track the registrants on a yearly basis; some people attend one or two sessions while others attend every week over one year or more.

Transportation to the sessions is a continual challenge. While a few participants come by bike, we arrange car pools for others, or have tutors go to learners' homes. We work with the Lincoln Community Care centre to provide daycare for participants with young children.

Available and Visible

We make ourselves available and visible within the Library and are often approached for assistance. The librarians refer people to us, and sometimes we initiate a conversation when we see someone reading the classified ads in the library. Individual appointments are made for assistance to create résumés, access information and conduct research through trade directories, National Occupational Classification Indices, Apprenticeship Training Materials and other resources as well as for personal help.

In partnership with the St. Catharines Canada Employment Centre we provide, to all Club members and the public, local online access to the computerized Jobdatabase showing current information on jobs and statistical information about the local labour market. A

volunteer is available to assist with reading and interpreting the data when necessary. Printouts and assistance on request are also provided currently to our satellite program at the West Lincoln Library.

Our tutor volunteers are available to provide assistance on basic computer preparedness. The learning sessions are usually two hours in length by appointment. When two of our middle-aged members took the plunge and requested tutoring to get started on the computer, a volunteer spent two hours each week coaching the pair on computer preparedness. These two are now proudly processing their own cover letters and business materials created with the help of the volunteer tutors.

Intensive Job Search Clubs

In February 1993, we actively solicited and supported a 3-week intensive Job Search Club brought to the local area by the St. Catharines Canada Employment Centre. More than 30 unemployed people attended the information session. We distributed our Factsheet regarding the services we could provide and we received more than 20 telephone calls requesting further information.

In June 1993, we co-sponsored a repeat session which took place at the Municipal Offices. Since that time we have co-sponsored 4 sessions a year in co-operation with the St. Catharines Canada Employment Centre and the program deliverer, YACES.

Other Activities

We have also co-sponsored a semi-annual Career Change Workshop held locally by the Regional Occupational Help Centre, and Information Nights featuring many regional program providers presenting training and re-training opportunities.

We have co-sponsored workshops on starting your own business presented by the JobsOntario New Enterprise Program of Niagara College and a JobsOntario Counsellor visits our Job Finders Centre every third Monday to distribute information and applications for the program.

Over the past year, during Phase II of the project, we have produced a cable TV program entitled JOBTALK which is aired every week

locally. This is a program on our services in partnership with regional service providers to assist all job seekers in the local area.

How Are We Doing?

The pilot project has been deemed a success story by the Ministry and by our Council. The many letters of thanks and success stories from our participants give us a similar report. The numbers of people who attended showed that our program met a need for literacy upgrading and job search support in our local area. Our program boosted the participants' self-esteem and pride so they could raise themselves up to become successful. A lot of these people are now employed.

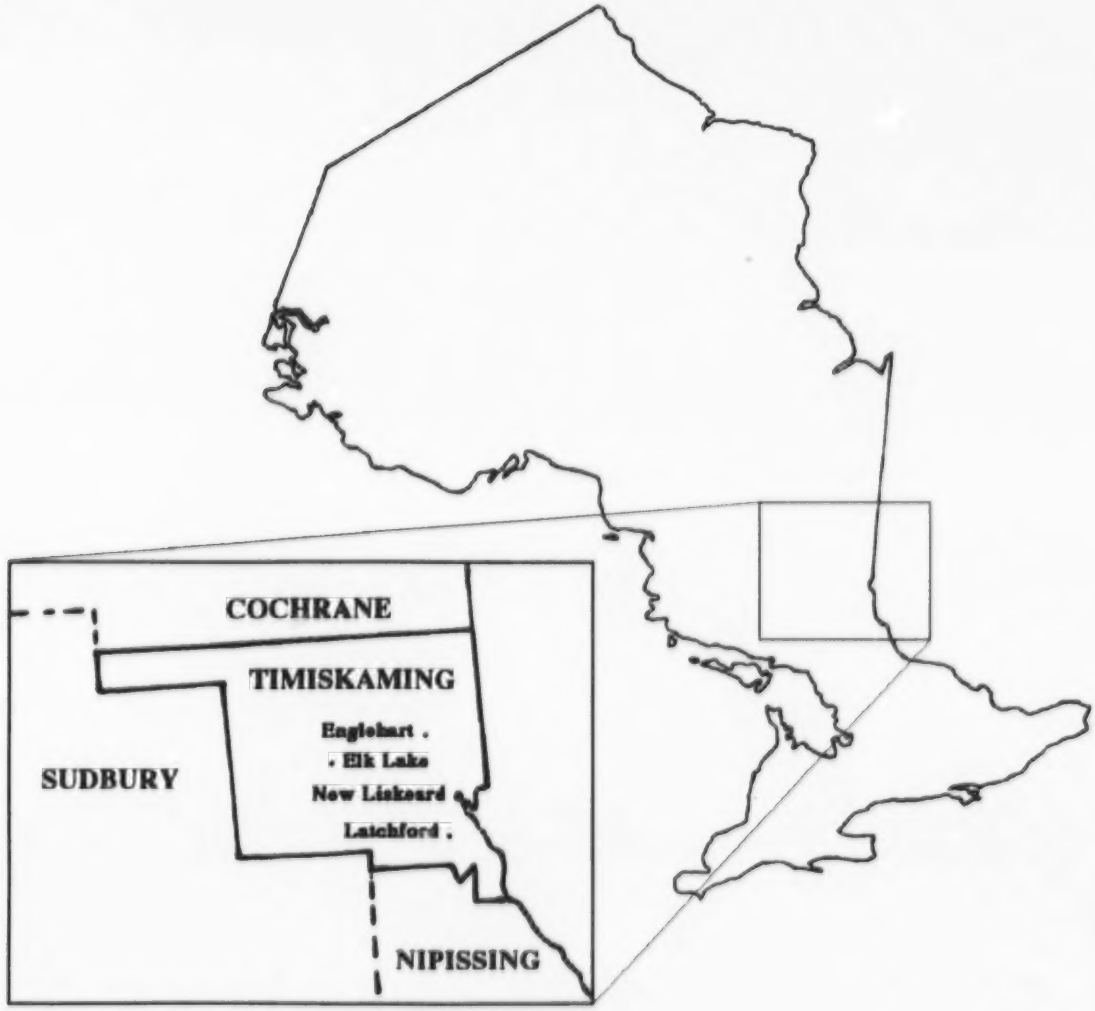
The Job Finders Centre services are now established in the community and have been incorporated into our core programming for 1995. We work with many partners to respond to the needs of the community and we feel we have proved that this model can provide the contemporary broad-based literacy skills which are essential underpinnings for both workplace and life satisfaction.

If we were to undertake this project again, I don't think we would change a thing. We spent our first year advertising and networking, and ran the program very successfully on a shoestring. Of course, we might have wished for more money, space and equipment....

About the Author

Margaret Maynard is the Manager of Business Training Programs for the Literacy Council of Lincoln. With a BA in Psychology and an extensive background in business and communications, her primary interest is adult education.

Library
Resume


COCHRANE
TIMISKAMING
Englehart
Elk Lake
SUDBURY
New Liskeard
Latchford
NIPISSING

A Novice Researcher's Reflections:

Flying by the Seat of My Pants

- Transcribed from a tape recording -

recorded by Dan Woods
transcribed and edited by Donna Miniely

The Context of the Project

In 1994, Dan Woods was hired by the South Temiskaming Literacy Council as a Special Projects Officer. He was to research the following questions:

- were people in rural areas aware of the Council's services?
- if yes, were they interested in participating?
- if yes, what barriers had prevented their participation to date (e.g. child care, transportation, distance, language, location, time)?
- if barriers were removed, would they participate?

South Temiskaming is a rural area extending along Hwy 11 North, approximately 500 kilometres north of Toronto. It is bordered on the south end by Latchford, a small community of 400 people. Temiskaming extends north as far as Englehart (pop'n 1737) and west as far as the village of Elk Lake (pop'n 356). The area is bounded on the east by the Ontario/Quebec border.

The South Temiskaming Literacy Council's Resource/Drop-in Centre is centrally located in New Liskeard. However, given the large distances and inclement weather during our long winter, travelling to and from the Resource Centre is not feasible for the rural learners.

Lessons Learned in Retrospect

To begin with, I think that probably one of the most useful things I've learned while doing this project was the fact that there is a definite research process to be followed and when followed, it certainly makes the undertaking of a project much easier. I also found that you could never document too much.

When I began the project, I had never been involved in any type of research project before, and wasn't really aware of what was expected of me as far as research on this particular program went. I was more of the mind that there was a job to be done and I was going to go out there and recruit, set up small group learning classes, develop a curriculum and deliver this curriculum and everything was going to be just fine.

As things turned out, it was a huge success. Our rural literacy program had calls from throughout the province asking about our successes and how things went and how we came about to the end that we did. However, I think that since attending conferences and talking with the Literacy Field Research Group coordinator, I now - after the fact - know that there is a definite research process and if it is followed, it makes the undertaking so much easier."

Objectives Should Have Been More Specific

Looking back, I can see numerous things that I did wrong and that I did not do and I think that if I ever did take on another project, I would certainly do differently. I think we should take the time at the very beginning of the project to lay out meticulously the objectives or plan our attack and then decide on the methods of the evaluation, setting perimeters and not letting ourselves get away from those goals that we have set down. I don't think in my project I ever did sit down and say "What particular need am I looking to address?" And I think that was very important: I should have identified one specific need and addressed that.

My strategies changed almost daily or definitely weekly. Depending on what I was feeling or how I was feeling about things, I was changing my strategy. If something didn't work, I was trying something else. I really didn't know from the very beginning how I was going to go about doing the project. I guess if that's called 'flying by the seat of your pants', that's exactly what I was doing.

I think, in one way, what saved me was that I documented things meticulously. I don't think you can ever have too much information documented. However, you can go a little overboard as I did, in doing too lengthy a narrative report to talk about what you did, how you did it and what not.

Bias Unrecognized

I think that probably when I approached the project, the first mistake that I

made was that I didn't recognize that I was approaching the project with a bias: I went into the project with a belief that there definitely was a need and that there definitely would be a rural literacy program set up when in fact the first part of the project was to encompass a feasibility study. Then, if it was found that there was enough of a demand, I believed that the project would continue. I never for once thought that there wasn't the need and just went into it. I had learned from the experience of individuals who had worked on literacy in that area that there would be this need. There had never been small group learning programs set up although we did have a number of volunteer tutors in the area. So I learned from their experiences, findings and mistakes."

Because of this bias, I found that my objectives tended to change frequently throughout the length of the project. For example, when I first started, I found that there was such a stigma attached to illiteracy that automatically my most important objective became to remove this negative image through public awareness. So, I felt that I had to launch a public awareness campaign and become, first of all, a really good public relations person for the cause which I guess, in effect, was part of the program, but certainly didn't involve any research."

Quantitative vs. Qualitative

It may be an opinion that this report lacks a large statistical basis from which to generalize conclusions, but it's my opinion that we at literacy tend not so much to analyze what we do or why we do it: we just recognize the fact that something has to be done and we take the bull by the horns and do what we think is necessary, when we think it's necessary without "analyzing it to death".

On the whole, when it came down to qualitative versus quantitative, I don't think I had the expertise at the time to realize that I could actually do the project and have results showing both qualitative and quantitative measurements. I think I chose not to focus on the quantitative measurement of the program results and tended to direct my research in the project towards the qualitative end of things. However, for the quantitative measurement, I did gather statistics and you'll see some of the charts used to gather this information.

Some of these statistics were gained by direct, natural observations: on-site visits to locations where the program was running by people who I felt were unbiased. On occasions when I didn't have an outsider coming in and observing what was going on, I tried to be as unbiased as possible and tried to be observant myself.

As far as analyzing the data, I think I have statistics to back up what has occurred through the project: the results that I say I have. I have statistics to prove that, but I never really did sit and analyze the data. I sort of went with what felt right at the time. And I think that I treated it as a job that had to be done and went about doing it without really thinking of it in a research frame of mind.

Some of the statistics I was able to gather and show in black and white were attendance records and results of tests given to the learners. I found that I had to use the numbers and statistics to add conciseness to my report. I couldn't go all qualitative because it was already a very wordy narrative.

Frequent Program Evaluation

I also surveyed the group by giving them a very basic evaluation form at the end of each our sessions and these surveys provided me with information. The learners were directly assessing such things as the setting of the program, the activities that we had done that day or that night, and the group itself - how they felt the group (the learners present) had worked together that evening. The non-statistical analysis was just my feelings about how things were going on and also some discussions. No actual evaluation or markings were put down as feedback - just one-on-one chats over coffee, asking learners how they felt things had gone that afternoon or evening or how things on the whole were going. This was non-statistical in that I didn't mark any of this information down or keep records of it, but I was able to change the direction of things as we went along from day to day.

The testing, I found, was my way of evaluating or assessing the progress of the learners and, I guess ultimately, the effectiveness of the program. I also felt that it offered the learners tangible proof that they were in fact moving toward their goals. It provided encouragement and a lot of self-confidence to these people who didn't really realize that they were attaining these goals in small but very definite steps. It also provided me with feedback and encouraged me because a lot of times, until we actually sat down and went through tests and compared scores from 3 weeks before, I wasn't aware of how far along that particular learner had come either.

I feel that there is definitely a lot to be learned on how to quantify qualitative information. I think that a lot of times too many people rely solely on written tests for evaluation. Other less formal procedures can be used for evaluation and I don't think a lot of people realize that. I think we have to be very flexible in the methods that we use to collect data. It's not just standardized tests that we should be getting our information from but also questionnaires, surveys and interviews with the people who are concerned.

I think that it was very important for me to tell the learners or inform the learners about the evaluation procedures that we were using and the purposes. Right from the very beginning, the learners were made aware that this was a project that I was gathering data from and that I was gathering it on them. This didn't seem to bother anyone at all. They knew that they wouldn't be used as guinea pigs and that they would remain anonymous.

Advisory Committee Needed

I realize from talking with you, Donna, that it is highly recommended that we get a group or a committee together to act as someone to bounce off what we're doing. That way, they can keep us on task by setting the perimeters and making sure that we aren't getting outside of the perimeters, or accomplishing things that we hadn't actually set out to accomplish. I didn't have any kind of a committee or anyone to bounce those types of things off.

If ever I were going to take on another project like that, I would certainly see that I had an advisory committee or someone I could touch base with - I would say even weekly. And do a very minor report and have the feedback from them, the assurance that I was in fact in the right direction. With this project, I had to submit an interim report and I did that. It was a narrative report with a few numbers thrown in, as to contacts made and of

those contacts made, how many had joined the classes. I thought it was fine and it went through. Our coordinator felt that it was all right. It was sent in, and we got no feedback on that, so I continued on the way I was going.

Success Followed by Disappointment

Of everything that was done, I think things turned out successfully - that's my personal evaluation. The coordinator's evaluation was that it was very much a success. And our board of directors was very happy with the way the project ended up. I guess the bottom line was numbers and we were running over with numbers. In all four communities that we set up classes in, there was always a fairly large group. At one point, we had a group of 12 people in Elk Lake. Unfortunately, funding dried up and everyone felt that the rug was pulled out from under them. That was unfortunate and it left a lot of people with a sour taste in their mouths.

I think a big mistake on my part was that I took on the project and forgot that it was a pilot project and that it was only for a specific time. I had felt that if it was a great success, then the funding would be there. I learned the hard way that the funding wasn't there, whether things were successful or not.

Conclusions

To sum up, I think that I should have looked into my research area a bit more. Knowing what I was out to find, what did I want to know?

Secondly, my greatest problem, and I think this comes from me being such a novice, was that I didn't really know who this information was for. Who needs it? I knew a copy would be sent off to the people who funded the project, the Literacy Secretariat. But I really wasn't aware that this information could be used in such a way that it could help all the other literacy practitioners and programs in the province, or even in the country.

Starting out, I didn't identify the type of information that was needed and I really didn't know how I was going to find out the information. Like I say, I was biased. I just knew there was a need for literacy programs in the rural areas and my top priority was the delivery of these programs.

Looking back on things, I think I tried to study too much. It became too generalized. It didn't keep within the perimeters that I should have set for myself, and as a result, I think the research - from a researcher's point of

view - probably lost a bit of its value because it was trying to reach much too broad an audience. I was doing too much in the ways of recruiting, setting up programs, and setting up curriculums. I wasn't as specific as I probably should have been."

Comments from Vicki Trottier, the Literacy Council Coordinator

"... I believe that this project was as successful as it was because of Dan's personality, especially his informal and non-traditional approach to working with adult students...and his ability to communicate with and gain the respect of his target population."

"Although this project was designed as a combined research/pilot project, it quickly became obvious that delivery should be its focus. The first phase of research revealed that there was definite interest in literacy programming."

"Time, distance and travel difficulties were cited as barriers to participation. Significant interest was expressed in attending classes if they could be provided closer to home. Therefore the project focus changed to marketing and delivering a series of small group sessions throughout our rural areas. The delivery phase of the project was extremely successful."

"To summarize, this research-based project quickly became a delivery project based on the needs expressed by the target population. While Dan's opportunity to conduct a full-scale research project was somewhat curtailed by this development, the change in focus did indicate that he was able to ascertain and respond to stated needs in a very short period of time.... He was able to cut through the sometimes cumbersome routine of research and get to the heart of the matter."

About the Author

Dan Woods is an instructor at the South Temiskaming Literacy Council's Resource/Drop-in Centre in New Liskeard. With an honours degree in English and Psychology, he has taught at elementary, secondary and community college levels. He enjoys using a variety of non-traditional teaching methods.

Following are a few of the surveys, questionnaires and tools used to gather data on the groups set up in the rural areas. As well as these, diagnostic Math and reading tests were given and results documented.

SURVEY OF GROUP DEVELOPMENT [1]

For each area, place an X in the box which most nearly describes the group.

1. UNITY (Degree of unity, cohesion or "we-ness")

- ☐ Group is just a collection of individuals or sub-groups; little group feeling.
- ☐ Group is very close and there is little room or felt need for other contacts and experience.
- ☐ Some group feeling. Unity stems more from external factors than from real friendship.
- ☐ Strong common purpose and spirit based on real friendships. Group usually sticks together.

2. SELF-DIRECTION (The group's own motive power)

- ☐ Little drive from anywhere, either from members or worker.
- ☐ Domination from a strong single member, a clique, or the worker.
- ☐ Group has some self-propulsion but needs considerable push from worker.
- ☐ Initiation, planning, executing and evaluation comes from total group.

3. GROUP CLIMATE (The extent to which members feel free to be themselves)

- ☐ Climate inhibits good fun, behavior and expression of desires, fears and opinions.
- ☐ Members freely express needs and desires; joke, tease and argue to detriment of the group.
- ☐ Members express themselves but without observing interests of total group.
- ☐ Members feel free to express themselves but limit expression to total group welfare.

4. DISTRIBUTION OF LEADERSHIP (Extent to which leadership roles are distributed among members)

- ☐ A few members always take leader roles. Rest are passive.
- ☐ Many members take leadership but one or two are continually followers.
- ☐ Some of the members take leader roles but many remain passive followers.
- ☐ Leadership is shared by all members of the group.

[1] from an Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food publication,"Statistical Research and Analysis"

5. **DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSIBILITY** (Extent to which responsibility is shared among members)

- ☐ Everyone tries to get out of jobs.
- ☐ Many members take leadership but one or two are continually followers.
- ☐ Responsibility carried by a few members.
- ☐ Leadership is shared by all members of the group.

6. **PROBLEM SOLVING** (Group ability to think straight, make use of everyone's ideas and decide creatively about its problems)

- ☐ Not much thinking as a group. Decisions made hastily, or group lets leader or worker do most of the thinking.
- ☐ Some thinking as a group but not yet an orderly process.
- ☐ Some cooperative thinking but group gets tangled up in pet ideas of a few. Confused movement toward solutions.
- ☐ Good pooling of ideas and orderly thought. Everyone's ideas are used to reach final plan.

7. **METHOD OF RESOLVING DISAGREEMENTS WITH GROUP** (How does group work out disagreements?)

- ☐ Group follows lead of leader or waits for the worker to resolve disagreements.
- ☐ Compromises are effected by each sub-group giving up something.
- ☐ Strongest sub-group dominates through a vote and majority rule.
- ☐ Group as a whole arrives at a solution that satisfies all members and that is better than any single suggestion.

8. **MEET BASIC NEEDS** (Extent to which group gives a sense of security, achievement, approval, recognition and belonging)

- ☐ Group experience adds little to the meeting of most member's needs.
- ☐ Group experience contributes substantially to basic needs of most members.
- ☐ Group experience contributes to some degree to basic needs of most members.
- ☐ Group contributes substantially to basic needs of all members.

9. VARIETY OF ACTIVITIES

- ☐ Little variety in activities - stick to same things.
- ☐ Considerable variety in activities. Trying out new activities.
- ☐ Some variety in activities.
- ☐ Great variety in activities. Continually trying out new ones.

10. DEPTH OF ACTIVITIES (Extent to which activities are gone into in such a way that members can use full potentialities, skills and creativity)

- ☐ Little depth in activities - just scratching the surface.
- ☐ Considerable depth in activities. Members able to utilize some of their abilities.
- ☐ Some depth but members are not increasing their skills.
- ☐ Great depth in activities. Members find each a challenge to develop their abilities.

11. WORKER-MEMBER RAPPORT (Relations between the group and the worker: % who are)

- ☐ Antagonistic or resentful..
- ☐ Friendly and interested. Attentive to worker's suggestions.
- ☐ Indifferent towards worker. Friendship neither sought nor rejected. Non-communicative.
- ☐ Intimate relations: openness and sharing. Strong rapport.

12. ROLE OF THE WORKER (Extent to which the group is centred about the worker)

- ☐ Activities, discussion and decisions revolve about interests, desires and needs of worker.
- ☐ Worker acts as stimulator - suggests ideas or other ways of doing things. Helps group find ways of making own decisions.
- ☐ Group looks to worker for suggestions and ideas. Worker decides, when member gets into a jam.
- ☐ Worker stays out of discussion and makes few suggestions of things to do. Lets members carry the ball themselves.

13. STABILITY

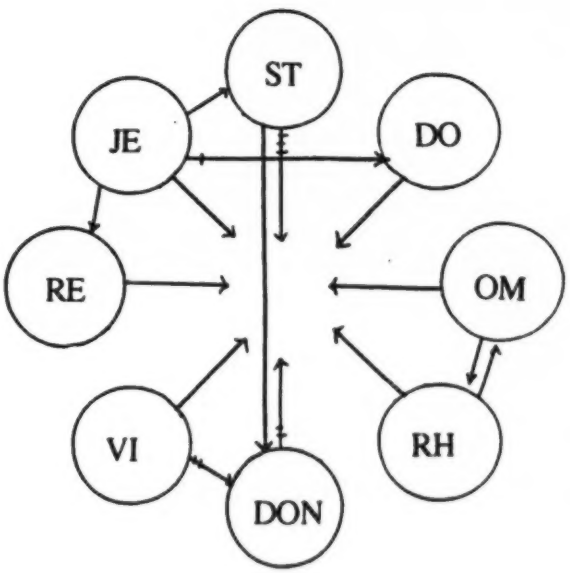
- ☐ High absenteeism and turnover: influences group a great deal.
- ☐ Some absenteeism and turnover with minor influence on group.
- ☐ High absenteeism and turnover: little influence on group growth.
- ☐ Low absenteeism rate and turnover. Group very stable.

Interaction Diagrams
Elk Lake Group

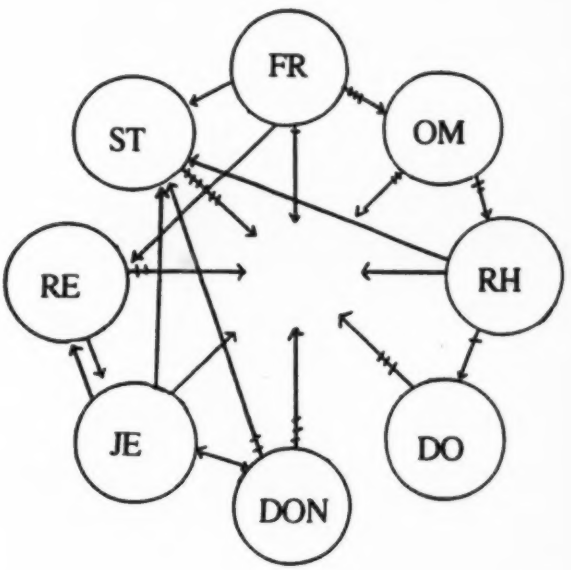
In these diagrams, each circle represents a student in the group. An independent observer watches the group twice for 5 minutes each time and notes who is speaking to whom. The teacher can discover how many people spoke up during the observation period by counting the number of interactions. The first interaction is shown as an arrow; subsequent interactions appear as strokes across the arrow. The teacher can also identify which students are interacting with each other, and which are not participating, thus perhaps needing to be drawn into the group more.

By repeating the observation process one month later, the teacher can see how classroom interactions have changed. In this example, the June 7 diagram indicates that most interactions involved students speaking to the teacher. The July 8 diagram indicates two changes: many more interactions, and more student-student communication.

June 7



July 8



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Recognition for Learning: Life Cycle of a Project

by Andrea Leis, Conestoga College

Birth of an Idea

Recognition for Learning (RFL) is a pilot project funded by the National Literacy Secretariat and the Ontario Training and Adjustment Board, Learning and Employment Preparation Branch. The initial idea of a system to recognize basic adult learning came from a presentation I heard about the Open College Network, based in Manchester, England. I took this idea back to my fellow members on the the Huron-Perth Literacy Committee (HPLC).

HPLC is an informal group which promotes literacy and literacy awareness in Huron and Perth counties and collectively identifies and works on related community needs. HPLC includes representatives from adult literacy programs offered by the Huron and Perth Boards of Education, Conestoga College, and St. Marys Adult Literacy Program as well as interested people from the two largely rural counties.

There were discussions at the next few HPLC meetings about developing a common method and certificate to recognize adult literacy learning in all of the HPLC member literacy programs. We could see the advantages of working as a team to make it easier for students to access the different kinds of training scattered through the 2 counties and move from one program to another. We also felt it would be beneficial to collaborate on professional development sessions. We had already developed a good level of trust and were willing to work at supporting each other under one umbrella.

Advisory Committee

A subcommittee was formed early in 1990. It met over the course of a year and agreed that RFL should provide students, instructors, and employers with a record of achievements and proof of progress toward identified goals. The group did not have any preconceived idea about how this would happen.

The subcommittee hired outside consultants to help develop a grant proposal. Their fee was conditional on project funding. The subcommittee

submitted a proposal one year later, to the Ministry of Education and Training and the National Literacy Secretariat. We received $50,000 in early 1992 for the Recognition for Learning pilot project.

The Recognition for Learning Board which emerged from the HPLC subcommittee continued to serve as a reference group for this project. It consisted of representatives from community-based, college, and school board literacy programs and learners in Perth and Huron counties. Hiring a coordinator was the next task of the board.

Getting Started

Gianne Broughton was hired for what became the first phase of the Recognition for Learning project (1992-93). Gianne's participatory style of research revealed that there were important shared points:

a) about students:
- students learn differently
- not all students feel the need for recognition but a recognition system should be available to all literacy students regardless of delivery sector

b) about instructors:
- instructors use informal assessment methods
- instructors use student-centred methods and want to protect that flexibility, and

c) about employers:
- employers want reliable records of performance
- employers need a standard format for the certificate

It was therefore agreed that assessment must be collaborative, informal, reliable, and valid. How was this to be accomplished?

Action and Reflection

Gianne reviewed the literature on assessment, evaluation and literacy and conducted key-informant interviews with employers, students, and practitioners. Her initial research findings were shared with the RFL Board and refined further, following a model of action and reflection which characterized this project. Information was gathered and applied to

the problem, and then a solution was presented and tested against agreed-upon criteria. Adaptations were made to improve the solution and it was tested again.

One example of this action and reflection process was the trial which Gianne conducted to see how teachers and tutors in Perth and Huron counties were already assessing their students' progress. She analyzed the results to develop an appropriate collaborative assessment process model which could document communication, numeracy, computer, personal growth and life skills.

Identifying Shortcomings

In a subsequent trial pilot, Gianne trained four instructors, and instructors and students assessed student progress. Instructors issued certificates and worked with their students to identify shortcomings of the trial test pilot process. Students wanted fancier certificates, tutors and teachers wanted sample completed certificates and more literacy skills inventories. Gianne developed new training kits and trained more tutors and teachers. Following the pilot, participants once again reviewed their experience and made recommendations.

Market Survey

A market survey was conducted to see how the general public and employers would respond to a system for recognizing adult learning. A final report was submitted and the RFL board realized that it was time to

apply for a second year of funding if the project was to have a longer test period and do more extensive outreach. The second phase of funding went into effect on April 1, 1994.

Broadening Out

Funding for a second year allowed the RFL model to be further developed through a broader application in Perth and Huron counties.

On September 9, 1994, 21 teachers and tutors from surrounding adult literacy programs attended a workshop to learn how to do collaborative evaluation and develop portfolios with their students.

Promotional efforts include press releases to local papers and communication with supervisors of the participating programs, Chambers of Commerce, Associations for Community Living, and Training and Advisory Committees. Members of the HPLC designed flyers and displays which were later improved by professionals. These materials are displayed at regional and local conferences and fairs.

In recognition of the significant amount of time the working board members put into specific tasks such as tutor training or promotion, honoraria based on actual time for the tasks accomplished were provided. A registry operator coordinates the project and keeps track of student registrations.

Support for the Concept

Developments in the field point to increased interest in the concept of recognition for learning at the literacy level as well as articulation among adult preparatory programs in Ontario colleges (Adult Preparatory Programs Articulation and Standards Project, ASP). Literacy is a foundation skill of adult preparatory programs. OTAB supports these projects through its system-wide Core Quality Standards in its objectives and strategies:

• 4.6 Recognition for Learning: To implement a system for recognizing and accrediting the foundation skills of adults at all learning levels.

In addition, literacy communities have identified evaluation and assessment as one of their priorities through the Literacy Community Planning Process.

Joining Forces

The next phase of RFL (funding period September 1, 1994 - August 31, 1995) depends on a collaborative board representing partners in literacy. However, it is the aim of this phase of the project to expand its community to all interested programs and potential partners in southwestern Ontario and to join forces with the Open Learning Network (OLN), a model developed in the Kingston area through Literacy Links Eastern Ontario. To minimize confusion, a new name encompassing both projects is used, "Recognition of Adult Learning" or "RAL".

The challenge is to combine the two models or at least identify the points of difference and commonality for further field testing. One main difference is the amount of documentation and method of reviewing skills attained. The OLN project used Skill Paths and an outside review panel while RFL was based on portfolio development and dialogue between tutor and student.

Meanwhile, OTAB has funded five other pilot projects to further develop a model to recognize the accomplishments of adults in literacy programs across sectors (community-based, school board, and college). These pilot projects will be "field testing" different aspects of a system combining the two models.

Development within the pilot areas will be communicated to the provincial steering committee. LLEO will coordinate provincial activities and maintain open communication channels with other evaluation projects such as the college Adult Preparatory Programs Articulation and Standards Project (ASP).

It is exciting to see how this local, grass-roots project has grown to be an important part of what is now a province-wide movement.

About the Author

Andrea Leis is a professor in the Ontario Basic Skills/literacy program at Conestoga College in Stratford, Ontario. She has worked in the field of adult education for 19 years and has taught in prisons, factories and a variety of community settings.

NEWS AND REVIEWS

Initial Assessment Survey Results

Bruce Henbest,
Tri-County Literacy Council
June 1995

reviewed by Donna Miniely

This report, packaged in a straightforward manner, conveys important infomation about initial assessment (IA) practices in community-based anglophone adult literacy programs throughout Ontario. Initial assessment seems to be an activity most programs have adopted, without questioning to any great extent the methods and tools used. This report indicates areas of common practice as well as gaps revealed by the survey.

Funded by the National Literacy Secretariat, the Initial Assessment Survey project was undertaken between March 1993 and June 1995. The project initially planned to include:

1) creating an inventory of current IA practices,
2) researching currently-used methods, tools and techniques so that they could be better understood and evaluated, and
3) experimenting with the most promising and suitable IA methods available.

The project provided an opportunity for programs to reflect on what they do, become aware of alternative assessment practices and take a position on whether or not they felt it necessary to modify their practices.

A Critical Aspect of Programs

Initial assessment is a critical aspect of literacy programs that may be taken too much for granted. While 81% of the survey respondents "agreed or strongly agreed that every adult learner entering a community-based literacy program should receive an initial assessment before they receive language instruction", there are diverse opinions about what form IA should take and what it should include.

Typically, the community-based programs have adopted informal means of assessment conducted while sharing information about the program and its approach, and discussing the learner's objectives. For the most part, the IA's don't focus directly on functional reading or writing skills or grammar, but collect information on a wide range of skills.

In his report, Bruce lists a variety of tools available for conducting IA's. He notes that more respondents were familiar with the various tools than have used them. He then raises questions that pop into the reader's mind, i.e. "Did some programs use these materials but become dissatisfied?" and "What materials were consequently modified or abandoned?" He is able to answer these questions from further information gathered by the survey.

This strategy points to the major strength in this report: its thoroughness. The author provides detailed information about the research process: what was asked, why and the responses obtained. He addresses the biases and assumptions implicit in the survey and report. The well-organized and clearly-written report contains no extraneous information. Bruce skillfully anticipates the readers' questions and answers them. The interpretations provided make the report "user-friendly".

Gaps Identified

The report also includes helpful calculations and lists, such as the quantity of resources (surprisingly small!) needed to equip the number of assessors in community-based programs across the province. One interesting list ranks the most common to least typical IA activities and the standard deviations. The report judges that most assessments appear logical and balanced, however finds it "perhaps ... noteworthy ... that numeracy skills appear to have been a relatively low priority." The widest gaps between what respondents felt should be assessed and what is currently assessed in the area of numeracy were in the following abilities:

- calculating areas
- telling time
- counting
- measuring and weighing
- handling money
- reading charts, graphs or tables
- naming numbers, and
- using percents.

There was also a significant gap between the expectations regarding assessment of learning disabilities and actual practice. There was strong

agreement that they should be assessed but are not.

One part of the report that (uncharacteristically) lacked clarity reports on degrees of consensus among practitioners regarding types of information or abilities that "should or should not be assessed". As these were combined into a single list, a reader has to dig deeper to determine which items respondents felt should be included in IA's and which overlooked.

This report certainly deserves careful attention by all adult literacy programs. Hopefully, programs will be spurred to reflect on their own current practice in initial assessment. Where necessary, programs should consider modifying the tools they use to close the gaps between what "should happen" and what actually takes place. Learners should require this kind of accountability from the programs of which they are consumers.

Learning to Learn: Impacts of the Adult Basic Education Experience on the Lives of Participants

Patty Bossort, Bruce Cottingham, Leslie Gardner
for The Adult Basic Education Association of British Columbia
November 1994

reviewed by Linda Shohet
The Centre for Literacy, Montreal

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Reports and studies pile up on my desk faster than I can read them, and once a month, I devote a day to skimming recent arrivals for any that warrant more thoughtful consideration. *Learning to Learn* is one of those.

Background

Commissioned by The Adult Basic Education Association of British Columbia and funded by the National Literacy Secretariat and the Ministry of Skills, Training and Labour, B.C. through shared project funding, this qualitative research study set out to determine the nature of the effects that participation in a literacy or Adult Basic Education (ABE) program has had on the lives of former students from their perspective; to describe the intended effects on students' lives from the instructors' perspectives; and to discover what conclusions might be drawn from the findings.

Design of the Study

Designing their ethnographic study, the project developers tried to reduce personal and theoretical bias. They chose two of the three researchers with no background in ABE; the researchers in turn conducted only a limited literature review before beginning the study. Working from qualitative

research specialist M.Q. Patton's concept of the "essence of shared experience," they worked on the premise that the "essence" of the impact of having participated in an ABE/literacy program would emerge from the stories of the students.

They collected their data through 1- to 3-hour interviews with 45 self-selected former students and 15 instructors in three locations in B.C., one urban, one metropolitan and one rural. Interviewees were reached through lists provided by instructors, responses to ads in various media, and contacts in social and community agencies.

It was not a random sample, but broadly diverse sample in terms of age, gender, ethnic origin, educational level and type of programme. More than 90% of the interviewees reported positive impacts from their ABE experience, a distribution that the researchers acknowledge as a limitation of the study sample. However, because they were focused on the *quality* of impacts, they still felt they had solid data from which to construct a conceptual model that could explain positive as well as negative student experiences.

Outcomes

As hoped, patterns did emerge from the data. The first part of the report is built around excerpts from the interviews arranged into three categories of impacts extrapolated from the transcripts - educational, psychological and social, and community and economic. The "essence" of the experience, the researchers state, is that people in ABE are "learning to learn".

While this may sound facile, the study moves on to a detailed analysis of the concept using a molecular rather than a linear model to explain the different elements involved in "learning to learn" and their interrelationship. These include the impact of acquiring reading, writing and numeracy skills; increased self-confidence; the ability to separate from past negative influences; greater reaching out; independence and participation in the world; greater awareness of self and others; possibility of choices; increased risk-taking; and successful life-style changes.

After the model had been developed, the researchers were directed to a recent study of men who had successfully broken the cycle of violence in their own families by becoming aware of themselves and their environment and resolving to be different from their fathers. University of Calgary researcher Beth Balshaw had constructed a model of that process that she called "Living Intentionally". The ABE researchers borrowed and adapted her model and combined it with the "learning to learn" model to

describe the experience of ABE program participants who reported positive impacts.

Conclusion

The chapter discussing the "intentional living" model is one of the most original and thoughtful sections of the study leading to the conclusion and hypothesis that:

> To the degree that any ABE program nurtures and enables the "learning to learn" model and the "living intentionally" process, enduring positive impacts as described in this study will result.

Implications: rethinking "drop-out" and "economic benefit"

The study's conclusion cites five major implications for the ABE system, two of which impressed me as topics that should be urgently addressed by the policy and program developers everywhere in North America. One is the need to rethink the drop-out label; the other is the role of Adult Basic Education in the economy and society.

The drop-out label has been widely discussed in many articles and studies of adult education. Contextualizing the discussion in the model of "living intentionally" gives it a new force. According to the findings of this study: what might appear as "drop-out," "resistance," "unmotivated" or "irresponsible" behaviour is, from the point of view of the ABE student who is engaged in "living intentionally," a rational and considered life choice based on the person's need and current situation (e.g. health issues, family problems, financial barriers, other life opportunities, and so on.)

In keeping with previous Canadian studies, this one found that most of the learners who had "stopped-out", because of circumstances beyond their control, had returned or had the intention to return to ABE *in spite of all kinds of barriers*. Half their sample had a multiple program background. They note that this could show a highly mobile population and could also "signify thoughtful, competent adults picking and choosing what is best for them in their lives at that time."

On the role of ABE in the economy and society, the report also offers an alternative to the job-related rhethoric of many current programs and funding agencies. While acknowledging the contradictory evidence on whether upgrading in ABE leads to employment, the study insists that the

economic benefits of ABE can be seen in the adoption of healthier lifestyles by those who have "learned to learn". The researchers want to expand the notion of economic impact to go beyond employment.

Obviously, for those who do get jobs, they agree, there is a direct impact in contribution to the economy and the tax base. But even for those who do not, there is less cost to society indirectly:

> Job or not, former students have told us they feel better about themselves, are making healthier choices about their lifestyles (e.g. stop drinking, stop criminal behaviour), are passing on this benefit to their children (as better parents), and are contributing to their communities (as better and more informed citizens). In addition, there is a benefit to society in terms of the time donated in volunteerism. That time does not show up on the balance sheet...
>
> There is a role for adult basic education as society grapples with higher health costs and turns to *health promotion as a social and economic strategy*.

These implications need to be circulated and acted upon in policy. There is not enough evidence of this in current practice.

Bossort, Cottingham and Gardner present their terms of reference and research methodology with clarity, including the questionnaires, which enables others to conduct similar studies in their own milieus. We need more of this kind of qualitative work to balance the number-crunching studies that so often distort the reality of adult education and work against the provision of responsive ABE programming.

One of the more provocative choices to *Learning to Learn* is the melding of literacy and ABE. It may be time to drop the artificial divisions we've created in our system, more often for funding purposes than for any reason related to learning.

The researchers are also forthright and honest about the intentions and possible limitations of the study. They stress the exploratory and basic nature of the research, the purpose of which was to provide information on the long-term influence of literacy education. The final report, they point out, is not intended as either a summative or formative evaluation of particular programs or interventions; it is a descriptive study whose conclusions would probably be most useful to policy makers, curriculum developers and program providers.

In the context of the society reforms and revamping of adult education and

literacy provision in keeping with the new proposals, this study should be summarized and included with all the adult education briefs across the country.

Is anyone out there listening? Does anyone out there care?